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ABSTRACT

Assistant principals (APs) who successfully influence principals to behave in ways that support their goals increase their chances of achieving desired resources. This paper describes how assistant principals can build influence and strong working relationships with their principals. To begin, APs must understand themselves, their principals, the nature of motivation, and the nature of the superordinate/subordinate relationship. Questions are then posed to help APs develop a profile of their principals' working styles. General strategies for constructing a strong relationship include: (1) identify the principal's expectations of the AP; (2) take the initiative; (3) look for solutions to problems; (4) get information from others; (5) cultivate a friendly, professional relationship with the principal's secretary; and (6) respect the chain of command. Specific tactics are offered for capturing the principal's attention, increasing the AP's usefulness, increasing the principal's dependence on the AP, and giving the principal a reason to support the AP's activities and requests. (Contains 34 references.) (LMI)

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THE INFLUENTIAL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL:
BUILDING INFLUENCE AND A STRONGER RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PRINCIPAL

SUGGESTIONS FOR FIRST-YEAR APs

A Presentation at the 79th Annual Convention and Exhibit of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, San Antonio, Texas February 1995

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BECOMING AN INFLUENTIAL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL:

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FIRST-YEAR AP

Successfully influencing the principal to behave in ways that support your goals as an Assistant Principal (AP) is done both directly and indirectly. Direct influence results from your own efforts within the context of the relationship you have with the principal. Indirect influence, which in some instances may be the preferred or even more effective method, is also the product of your efforts. Indirect influence on the principal, however, is mediated by intervening parties. The success of your indirect influence depends on how successful you are in building relationships and influence with those who, in turn, have the ability to influence or order the actions of the principal.

I. WHY BUILDING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRINCIPAL IS IMPORTANT

Power in any organization is grounded in the ability to control resources and the access to resources.[1] These resources include not only money, but people, time, space, information, and authority. Because the principal governs these in the school organization, his or her support offers you advantages on multiple levels. A denial of support reduces your access to the things you need to build influence with others.

The principal is pivotal in your influence building attempts because he or she can facilitate or retard your access to other significant players in the school and district. The principal can help you reach influential people in the building, in the central office, and in the community. The teachers and support staff with whom you work every day probably constitute the most immediately important group in building your broader influence, but your influence with them is not built through interaction with them alone. Credibility and leverage with teachers, classified staff, and community members are enhanced by association and support from people at upper levels in the hierarchy.[2] The principal can assist you in reaching across the hierarchy vertically as well as horizontally.

The principal can provide you with the budget support, additional personnel, and job responsibility configurations that can help to free you from routine tasks that consume your time. The principal can

encourage others in the school to work with you through the informal power of leadership, through the provision of incentives, or even by direct order. The principal can appoint or assign you to positions which will allow you access to other important people in the organization and the opportunity to structure situations in ways that can showcase your talents and services. The absence of this kind of support makes your attempts at building influence much more difficult.

II. WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO BEGIN BUILDING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PRINCIPAL

Influence and power are relationship entities. That is, they exist as a result of the relationship between two people, and they ebb and flow with changes in that relationship.

Every relationship has two sides. Your principal represents only half of the whole. The quality of your relationship with your principal does not depend alone on how your principal acts. It is at least equally dependent upon how you act. To build a strong relationship with your principal, you need to have a pretty clear idea of what each of you wants, the strengths and weaknesses you both have, and the characteristics of your personal styles. In short, you need to understand both yourself and your principal.

As management and personnel researchers John Gabarro and John Kotter point out, you and your boss have individual personality structures, values, and ways of working that have been built over time, and you are not going to change either yours or your principal's.[3] What you can do, however, is try to identify what things in those structures and systems either facilitate or impede your ability to work together. Once you are aware of these things, you can take actions that will enhance or mitigate their effects.

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

Before you begin investigating your principal's characteristics, it's appropriate to look at your own. After all, it's your half of the relationship over which you have the most control. There are varieties of survey instruments and inventories that can help you make a start on that type of introspection and in getting a sense of yourself. Among the better known which you might acquire and try are:

- *The Mach IV*, is an instrument that explores whatever Machiavellian characteristics you might have.[4] It measures the extent to which you tend to pay attention to the dynamics and outcomes

of situations in comparison to the extent to which you pay attention to the needs of people in situations.

- *The Kipnis-Schmidt Profiles of Organizational Influence Strategies* is an instrument that will give you a profile of the strategies you use to influence your supervisor at work.[5]
- *The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* helps you see if your dominant way of handling conflict is to compete, compromise, avoid, accommodate, or collaborate.[6]

Another way to get a quick look at your attitudes is to find a copy of David Keirsey's and Marilyn Bates' *Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types*.[7] A shortened variation of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Test that can quickly and privately be taken in your home or office, it is usually available in any bookstore. The Keirsey Temperament Sorter will not provide definitive insights into your personality -- no one shot inventory will do that -- but it will offer another view of how you interrelate with people, and interrelations and interactions with people are at the foundation of power and influence.

It's important to understand at the outset, however, that you probably cannot get a comprehensive, clear, and completely accurate picture of what you are like either personally or professionally. There are too many variables, too many things that are situationally determined, and too many ingrained psychological defenses for any of us to really see ourselves clearly. The effort to try is worthwhile, however. Some level of self-understanding is necessary before you can make a comparison of your own characteristics with those of your principal. But a more important value is that self-understanding helps you to identify the patterns of behavior in which you tend to either habitually or instinctively engage.

If you initiate a situation or react to one in a particular fashion automatically, you limit the range of behavior choices you might have. It is what psychologist Robert Cialdini calls the "click, whirr" response of "fixed-action patterns."[8] The danger is that sometimes the fixed-action pattern in which we respond is not best, or even appropriate, for that particular context. When that occurs, we make silly and costly mistakes. When we do it in interpersonal situations, we can jeopardize relationships -- and relationships are the foundation of influence.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PRINCIPAL

In thinking about how to better understand your principal, the same fundamental concept has to be kept in mind: As with yourself, you will never be able to fully understand him or her. There are just too many variables for you to see, comprehend, and interpret in the principal's personal and professional behavior. What you can do, however, is be observant enough to get a handle on his or her motivations and style. Your goal is to see things from the principal's perspective and to help the principal see things from yours.

Keep in mind that the principal is a target for inquiry and influence, not an adversary. It is easy to think of the principal as an adversary if he or she seems to consistently give attention, priority, resources, and recognition to school functions and needs other than your own, but to do so is a mistake. A fundamental tenet of psychology is that we react to our perceptions, and self-fulfilling prophesies do exist.[9] If you perceive the principal as an adversary you will behave differently than if you perceive the principal as a potential partner in helping you achieve your objectives. Adversaries are to be defeated. The principal, like other school personnel, is to be converted into an ally.

This implies at least four things to consider as you try to understand your principal's perspective. First, the principal's perspective on what goes transpires in the school, and on what should transpire in the school, is likely to be different in many respects from most of the faculty's. Your conception of how the school should ideally operate is almost certain to be closer to the principal's than that of the typical classroom teacher, but it can't be identical.

Second, the principal is likely always to want to know what is going on in the school and within its component parts. The search for information is constant and wide ranging, and you are in an excellent position to be a purveyor of useful information.

Third, the principal's sphere of authority and responsibility is much larger than yours. The principal has to be alert to not only potential disruptions, but also to the direction and quality of the goals and programs attempted and achieved. To at once monitor and project requires a simultaneous attention to long range needs and short term results. You are involved in much the same process, but there are key

differences are of scope and implication. The principal has to not only plan, provide for, and protect what is currently in place, but has to be thinking of the ramifications of each event and decision in relation to the outside society and to the potential for future accomplishment.

Fourth, the large sphere of responsibility and authority inevitably means that the principal has to struggle with competing and conflicting demands. In fact, as Stanford University's Larry Cuban has observed when talking about school superintendents, conflict is the DNA of school administration.[10] There are two fundamental reasons for this.

First, the nature of the school organization presents principals with the challenge of balancing the competing values of excellence, equity, and efficiency. These are ever in tension and each has its vocal advocates both within and outside the school organization.[11] The decision of how to arrange the priority of these three values has great impact not only on budgets, schedules, curriculum, and student and employee work conditions, but on how community members perceive the school.

Second, the nature of the principalship itself contains conflicting role demands. Principals, have multiple and often conflicting roles. For example, an academic and social conflict is apparent when trying to spread too few dollars among too many worthy programs: do you support chemistry or chemical dependence prevention? Another inherent conflict is found in serving as both employee facilitator and evaluator, trying to be a sounding board or confidant for staff members and simultaneously being responsible for their evaluation. Student discipline provides another example: how do you always support teachers and be just in discipline application when the student is in the right? Other conflicts emerge from demands of those outside the building that are incompatible with the needs of those inside: how do you satisfy the people in the central office or the community who want rapid change in the school with the need to allow time for planning, implementation, adjustment, reflection and evaluation among members of the school staff?

Role theorists suggest that people's behavior can be shaped by their perceptions of how other people want them to behave. This creates a terrible pressure on principals who are immediately subject to the expectations of a large number of people, among them:

- Certificated staff members, who will sometimes act as a unit, expecting the principal to buffer them from outsiders, and other times will be competing and in conflict themselves and expect the principal to solve the problem.
- Classified staff members, who also will sometimes act as a unit, expecting the principal to buffer them from outsiders, and other times will be competing and in conflict themselves and expect the principal to solve the problem.
- You and other assistant principals.
- Their peers in other schools.
- The personnel in the central office, especially the superintendent.
- The union.
- The students.
- The parents.
- Community members

The communication of the expectations these people hold is sometimes subtle and sometimes very direct. Inevitably, the principal gets caught.

You experience some of this kind of pressure in trying to balance the demands of the various individuals and groups who expect you to meet their needs. As you relate to the principal's situation, it helps to remember that he or she has the same problems you do, but on a broader canvas. Where you carry responsibility for a specified area or combination of areas, the principal carries responsibility for what you do as an assistant principal and for the outcome of your work in relation to all other parts of the school enterprise. Consequently, where you may see an issue as sitting near the center of the universe, the principal may see it as a smaller body orbiting larger issues.

All of this says that, because the principal is charged with meeting multiple demands in a context of finite and limited resources, virtually all of the requests anyone makes of the principal will be in competition, if not in conflict, with requests or demands made by others, both inside and outside the school organization. Competition is pervasive and relentless. The implication is clear that you must present your needs and desires in the most compelling light if you expect to receive support.

2. THE SUBSTANCE OF MOTIVATION

Understanding the school from the principal's perspective also involves understanding what personal motivations he or she has to respond to the opportunities and pressures of the office in certain ways. Again, you will never fully understand what motivates your principal, but you can detect some traits and trends if you are willing to observe and assess.

Need for Achievement, Power, Affiliation

One way of trying to understand your principal's working style is to see what he or she seems to value most in relationships. Noted psychologist David McClelland has developed the argument that everyone has needs for achievement, for power, and for affiliation.[12] The manner in which these needs are mixed in an individual, and which dominates the others, affects the way that person behaves in working relationships.

Certainly, no two people experience the needs for achievement, power, and affiliation in exactly the same way. Each of us has our own proportion and balance. The intensity of each drive can have a marked effect on how your principal--and you--approach opportunities and problems.

The role of achievement motivation in leadership style is very complex. The research seems to show that the relationship between the desire for achievement and successful leadership is curvilinear rather than linear. People with a moderately high level of achievement motivation appear to be more effective as leaders and managers than people with either low or very high achievement needs.

Mangers with a strong achievement orientation are likely to have a strong concern for task objectives and are probably more willing to assume responsibility for solving task related problems and to act decisively to solve the problems they find. McClelland's work has shown that individuals with moderately high achievement needs tend to want to structure situations that have moderate risk rather than high risk, but the also are willing to give up conservative positions. These kinds of people set challenging but realistic goals and deadlines, develop mechanisms whereby they can get rapid and concrete feedback about their performance, and emphasize performance when talking to others.

People with high achievement needs set challenges to make themselves stretch a little, but only in situations where they can influence the result by personally performing the work. They often prefer to labor on a problem themselves rather than trust to others or leave the outcome to chance. They don't like to gamble. They are concerned with personal accomplishment more than with the rewards of success, and they like to have up to date information on how they are progressing.

Where the need for power is dominant, people tend to seek situations in which they can arrange things or events the way they want them; where they can influence or direct people to do what they want to have done. They want to get recognition. They want to command attention, and they want to have control. They are political in their activities, and particularly interested in controlling communication channels, both up from them to their superiors and down from them to their subordinates, so they can feel more in charge of situations.

McClelland's work shows there are two power need orientations: personal and socialized. Where the power need is personalized, the leader might be difficult to work and deal with. This is the kind of person who uses power for self-aggrandizement. They have a need to satisfy urges for esteem and status. They may have little self-control or inhibition. They may try to dominate subordinates. They centralize authority and restrict information. Rewards and punishments play a large part in controlling the behavior of others.

A socialized power drive, in contrast, is more emotionally mature. People with such a drive exercise power for the benefit of the organization and for the good of others. They tend to be less manipulative, less egoistic, and less defensive. They tend to have a longer-range view of things and are more willing to take advice from people who have relevant knowledge and experience. They are more likely to be coaching in their management styles.

Where the need for affiliation is dominant, people tend to want close friendships, and to maintain friendly relations with others. They are more concerned with how well they are liked or accepted than they are with achievement. They seek to avoid conflicts or smooth them over rather than confront unpleasant situations or deficient performance. They tend to avoid making unpopular decisions. They often dispense rewards more to gain approval than to recognize effective performance. These people have a greater need

for fellowship than for power. On the other hand, one cannot be an effective leader without any need for affiliation. Loners who don't socialize with others cannot establish the interpersonal relationships necessary for influence building.

All three of these needs are present in each of us. The question is, in what proportions? The stereotypical view of school administrators is that they probably have a greater need for power than for either achievement or affiliation. There's a logic to this, given the nature of the work the principalship calls for. But it would be a mistake to assume that about your principal without thinking it through and testing it against the ways in which you have seen him or her handle opportunities, challenges, and problems.

If you are interested in how you might be mixing your own needs for achievement, power, and affiliation, you can probably easily find some version of a "needs mix" survey in a book on organizational behavior or leadership theory. Keep in mind that inventories like these can only provide the slightest glimpse into what really exists, but they do have the twin values of surfacing your thoughts on the subject and asking you to confront your feelings.

The Importance of Understanding Your Principal

It is important to understand your principal's approach to the challenges of the job because it helps to clarify the situation for you. When the principal's actions cannot be understood, it is very easy to make incorrect assumptions. The danger to you comes from acting on assumptions that are erroneous. To whatever extent you can demystify the principal, you improve the odds of accurately assessing situations, adjusting to their realities, and being able to effectively work with him or her. You can't change the principal, but the insights you gain can help you to better manage your half of the relationship.

The difficulty with attempting to gain insights about another person is that such insights have a shelf life. That is, people and situations change over time, and people often change as situations change. Your ability to predict the direction of the changes would be better if you had full information about all the pressures, personal and professional, that your principal is subject to, but you never will. You will always be making judgments based on incomplete and changing data. This means that you must continually observe and never assume that you have learned all you need to know.

THE SUPERORDINATE/SUBORDINATE RELATIONSHIP

A major element in understanding your principal's perspective is to understand the nature of the superior/subordinate relationship and how your principal perceives you as a subordinate. John Gabarro and John Kotter of the Harvard Business School argue that many people misread the boss-subordinate relationship.[13] They contend that people do not often enough recognize that the relationship between the boss and subordinate is one of mutual dependence. Wrongly feeling themselves to be impotent to affect the relationship, they don't try as they might to improve it or to make it more effective.

Further, argues Kotter, many subordinates do not recognize the power they have or can build in the superior/subordinate relationship. For example, he contends, subordinates have power to the extent that:

- The skills they have are difficult to replace easily or quickly;
- They possess important specialized knowledge that others don't have;
- They have strong and positive personal relationships across the hierarchy that make it difficult to discipline or remove them without incurring the wrath of others;
- The job they have is central to the accomplishment of the boss's goals and agenda, and therefore have a large impact on the boss's ability to be successful;
- The job they do is interrelated with other important jobs and to jobs that are important to other people.[14]

It doesn't take much to see that these are all consistent with the position and status of an active assistant principal.

The simple truth is that the principal cannot individually make the school successful as an institution nor make the students successful as individuals. Research clearly shows that one of the characteristics distinguishing managerial positions from other jobs is continual dependence on the activities of other people.[15]

This is a fact too little examined in schools. Personal success in organizations, even the success of the person most visibly associated with it, is most often a result of working with and through other people. The overall success of the organization is often determined by how well the activities of individuals can be

coordinated.[16] In the main, those activities must in and of themselves be successful. In order for the principal to be successful, people in the school must be successful in their own spheres of operation.

The principal needs the help and cooperation of employees in order to do his or her job effectively. It is not possible to just order things done correctly. The nature of secondary schools makes this very clear. Unlike many companies in the private sector, the security of tenure provides teachers with a large measure of autonomy. Teaching has no system for vertical advancement except in the rarest of cases. Unless teachers leave the classroom for administration, the possibility of promotion is virtually nil. As Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Robert Floden of Michigan State University point out, the typical teaching career is marked by a few years' work to establish competence and secure tenure followed by decades of performing the same work over and over with different students.[17]

The consequence is that there is no threat to deny promotion that can motivate teachers. While they cannot be directly insubordinate, they can effectively minimize their commitment and service if they wish to. The isolation of the classroom offers teachers the opportunity to have a large portion of self-determination.[18]

Classified employees are not quite as secure in their positions as are teachers, but once past a probationary period, they also can maintain a minimally active work life. Given that schools are perennially understaffed for clerical and operational needs, a refusal to work at a level above the minimum can be crippling.

There is some broadening recognition of the leader/follower relationship between the principal and lower level employees showing up in the educational literature. The whole idea of empowerment suggests a realization that followers are central rather than tangential to the success of an organization. If leaders are to have good followers, they must offer them opportunities to shape and participate in the progress of the organization.[19] Your opportunity to influence what goes on in your school grows out of this reality.

It's not self-serving to try to improve working associations or to increase your influence. Improved relationships serve the organization as well as the individual participants. As John Kotter points out, the managing of the relationship with the boss is a necessary and legitimate part of your job, especially in a

period or situation where leadership is particularly difficult -- as it is in schools today. There are two reasons for this, he argues.

First, the superior/subordinate relationship is one of mutual dependence between people with different skills, perspectives, backgrounds, and pressures who must work together. If the relationship is not well managed, neither person can be maximally effective. Second, unless you are willing to accept the idea that the boss/subordinate relationship is like the one between parent and child, then you have to take some responsibility for managing it. The principal is not always more wise, mature, well informed, or knowledgeable than others in the school. The counsel, support, and quality performance of the subordinate is essential, and it should be shared.[20]

In short, you and the principal need each other, you have the potential to make each other successful, and the success of the organization is grounded in your doing so. "Good leadership," as Trudy Heller and Jon Van Til put it, "enhances followers, just as good followership enhances leaders."[21]

SPECIFICS TO OBSERVE ABOUT YOUR PRINCIPAL

To this point, the discussion of ways to develop an understanding of your principal has focused on abstractions. The approach has asked you to accept theoretical models and make subjective analyses and interpretations. Those ideas are useful in understanding your relationship with the principal, and in coming to appreciate your principal's responsibilities and motivations, but they don't suggest very much in the way of actions to help you get a handle on how he or she works. The purpose of this section is to operationalize some of those ideas and offer suggestions of specific things to look for in your principal's working style. Without this information you can inadvertently increase the odds of precipitating unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings.

The Elements of Your Principal's Working Style

If you can build a profile of your principal and his or her working style, you can make comparisons with your own and then make adjustments. While the superior/subordinate relationship is one of mutual dependence, it's not usually one of equal dependence. With the authority of position, the principal remains more the person to accommodate than you do.

The questions below collectively attempt to sketch a working description of your principal. See if you can ascertain the answers to these questions.

- **What are your principal's primary objectives? That is, where does he or she place real emphasis? Is it on order and discipline in the school? On activities and athletics? On public relations? On the college bound student? On instruction in general?** With this information, you can make judgments about areas to select for information dissemination, for getting involved in projects, and for discussion. It provides a measure of philosophy as well.

- **Is your principal on the way up? How ambitious for advancement is he or she?** You can anticipate that a principal strongly pursuing advancement will have different emphases than a principal who plans to retire out of his or her current position.

- **How does your principal get along with the superintendent? Are they philosophically aligned? Do they work well together? What can you tell about how the board members feel about your principal?** This information will let you assess what kinds of pressures your principal is under. It will give you an idea of who is leaning on him or her and how much support he or she can look for in times of conflict.

- **What experiential path did your principal follow to the office? Did he or she come from outside the district? Outside the building? What position(s) did the principal hold before this one? What was his or her reputation there? Out of what teaching discipline did the principal come?** This information is useful in several ways. First, a new principal has motivations and needs different from those of an experienced administrator.[22] A seasoned principal has been socialized to the job and can more quickly come to focus on technical issues. A neophyte has to first work through a variety of socialization and self-definition issues. Each will require different kinds of information and support.

Second, a principal who was a teacher in the same school has a "history" with people that newcomers brought in from outside don't have. This affects their relationships, because outsiders coming in are perceived differently than insiders promoted. This difference in perception can include a

presumption of competence which, accurate or not, can put a lot of pressure on the principal.[23]

Third, there is evidence that an assistant principalship may or may not be adequate preparation for the principalship (something for you to keep in mind as you plan your career path).[24] If your principal served in only one narrow capacity as an assistant, he or she may have an uneven distribution of knowledge and skills and require more assistance in some areas than in others.

Fourth, the teaching discipline from which the principal came may still remain an important interest area, and something you might use to open lines of communication.

- **How formal or informal is your principal?** This information may give you a measure of the principal's self-perception. Some like to interact on a first name basis with the people they see every day. Others want to be addressed by title; many particularly do if it is "doctor". The level of informality and formality also may give you a feeling for the principal's sense of humor. It will help you to understand if you can use humor to help build a relationship, or if you would hurt the relationship by so doing.

- **How much control does the principal maintain in delegating tasks or in working with committees?** This information may give you a glimpse of the principal's mix of needs for achievement, power, or affiliation. If you pursue a close working relationship with the principal, you will be subject to these needs. It's important to know whether you need to meet with the principal at specified points in a project or if you are expected to show up at the end with the completed product.

- **What are the major issues facing the principal today in your school? In your district? Where does he or she stand on these?** This is another measure of both pressure and philosophy. It can tell you how close or far apart you and the principal are on given subjects, and it can tell you where he or she may have to put priority attention for the foreseeable future.

- **How does your principal relate to the union?** Another measure of pressure and philosophy, and perhaps a glimpse at how adversaries are perceived.

- **Has your principal been involved in attempts, successful or not, to terminate any teachers in your school? Has he or she been involved in conflicts over student rights, club activities, contents of the student newspaper or other publications?** This information can give you a sense of how aggressive your principal might be in pursuing his or her philosophy or authority.

- **How well does your principal handle criticism?** This information can be useful in determining how to approach him or her regarding a problem. Some people can handle criticism of programs, policies, practices, and other global issues very well, but at the same time be unable to gracefully handle criticism of themselves. Others, of course, handle both very well, and still others neither.

- **How does your principal react to stress?** Knowing how your principal reacts to stress can help you in several ways. First, if you can read the signs, you will know those times not to make an approach. Second, you might see opportunities to reduce the intensity of the situation and thereby improve your standing. Third, you may be able to compare behavior during stress periods with how you are treated other times, which will help you avoid taking personally things that aren't meant to be personal.[25]

- **Is your principal a morning, afternoon, or evening person?** This information can help you gauge when best to approach the principal about things of interest and importance to you both.

- **Is there something your principal considers absolutely unforgivable in interpersonal relations?** We all have idiosyncrasies. This will give you a guideline for matching yours to your principal's.

- **How direct is your principal in language use?** As Andrew DuBrin points out, managers sometimes attempt to soften their really non-negotiable demands through polite language.[26] It is a problem to interpret "If it's not too much trouble ... " as an option if the message really is "Do it ... and soon," or "May I suggest ... " as a real suggestion instead of as an expectation.

- **Does the principal appear to prefer dealing with a wide range of things at once, or is there a preference for concentrating on a single issue?** Knowing this can help you prepare materials and adapt to the principal's style.

How does your principal best receive information? Peter Drucker classifies managers as "readers" and "listeners." You need to know if your principal is someone who prefers written or oral presentations and whether they should be terse or elaborate. The implications, according to Drucker, are clear. If your principal is a reader, send a written report first and follow it up with a face-to-face discussion. If your principal is a listener, brief him or her on the subject, or make a presentation, depending on the principal's preference, and the send a written report afterward.[27]

III. STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR BUILDING DIRECT INFLUENCE THROUGH YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PRINCIPAL

This section has two parts. The first describes strategies useful in the construction of a strong relationship with your principal. These are general approaches to working with him or her. They outline broad behaviors rather than specific activities. The second section is a list of specific tactics you might employ to capture the principal's attention, increase your usefulness to him or her, increase the principal's dependence on you, and give him or her reason to support your activities and requests.

STRATEGIES

Two good examples of this tension are common features in secondary schools: (1) Principals have to evaluate excellence and equity issues in deciding which classes and programs should be funded and made available to different types of students. Is it right to spend more money and personnel on one type of student than on another? Should we promote excellence with special education classes, honors programs, and advanced placement, or should we provide a core of classes funded at the highest possible level to everyone? (2) Principals have to try to balance excellence and efficiency in making scheduling and instructional quality decisions. Should a teacher be assigned outside his or her area of expertise because we need a fourth period history class and the master schedule will not work any other way, or should that particular class not be offered because a teacher trained for it is not available? Do we hire the best English teacher we can possibly find, or do we hire the best English teacher we can find who can also coach a sport?

Get early and continuing clarification of what the principal expects of you and from you. Your responsibilities need to be clearly understood by both you and the principal. Congruent views of your role, duties, rights, and opportunities are critical to the overall relationship. They must be constructed at the outset, so you don't waste time, energy, or resources on things that will not be valued by either the principal or the school.

These perceptions must be continually monitored and updated for two reasons. First, because schools are not static institutions and conditions change. This is particularly true if your school is caught up in change as a result of shifts in community resources or demographics or if it is involved in internal restructuring. New projects and programs may lend themselves to reordering of responsibilities and roles. Secondly, many of your activities will precipitate change as you go about building influence with teachers, students, parents and others in the building and district.

If you can regularly get clarification of what the principal expects, especially if you are attempting to simultaneously shape some of those expectations, you will be in a better position to sense what the principal wants to have happen. You will also be in a better position to make the right decisions when unforeseen events arise, as they always will.

Change has an ebb and flow to it. There are likely to be periods of loosening and tightening as concerns about resources and people's feelings surface and are dealt with. You want to avoid being boxed in by contractions or overwhelmed by rapid expansion of opportunities or support. The only way to do this is to actively seek shared understandings of what is going on and what your role is in it.

An assistant who is made uncomfortable by change, who doesn't see the superior/subordinate relationship as a mutual dependency, or who feels that the specific duties of the assistantship can remain a protected arena, may be tempted to withdraw and minimize contact with the administration. The most common result of this tactic is misunderstanding, which, in turn leads to mistakes, poor performance, and loss of the principal's confidence.[28]

Take the initiative. If you wait for the principal or the teachers to see the value of you and your office, you may wait a long time. There is too much going on in schools today to always wait for others to give direction or guidance. As Geoffrey Bellman observes, you have your position because of your

expertise. You need to search out opportunities to put to work what you know. Instead of waiting until the administration or teachers or parent groups or student groups ask you for help, you would do better to be out there offering it. The way you gain the respect of the organization is to anticipate its needs.[29]

This is a very important notion for assistant principals. Influence building depends more on saying "I can help you!" than in saying "If you want help, call." This is a radical break with the traditional role of the support function.[30]

Most managers value initiative in their subordinates, particularly if it prevents problems, solves problems, or multiplies the value of existing resources. Initiative also demonstrates a desire and willingness to take on new responsibilities. A reputation for being interested and concerned about the school, doing things your job description doesn't call for, and reaching out to others will keep you in mind when decisions are made about whom should receive opportunities. Such a reputation is a necessity if you have aspirations for higher administration later in your career.

- **Do your homework before going to see the principal; Try to deliver possible solutions when you deliver problems**. If you only come to see the principal with problems, after a while you may become associated in his or her mind with problems. Someone who solves problems and thereby makes the principal successful is going to be more influential than someone who only uncovers and defines problems.

It is important, however, that you report problems, not just immediate problems but those that you see beginning to emerge. Principals can only appreciate early warnings, but you do not want to develop a reputation as an alarmist or a negativist. Whenever possible, delay making your report until you have had a chance to investigate the situation and can generate a range of possible counters or solutions.

Christopher Hegarty points out another advantage to this strategy, especially if the problem involves you or your office: it reduces the odds that the principal will impose a solution that might be unacceptable to you.[31]

- **Be your own publicist and promoter, but be subtle rather than strident**. Influence is based on perceptions. In order to have perceptions of the importance of you and your work, the principal has to be

aware of them. Competence must be made visible. The principal has to evaluate your performance. It is in your best interest to help him or her do that in a way that is both accurate and positive.

Get out and talk to people before you talk to the principal. The principal needs current information in order to make the best decisions for the school. You need current information in order to make the best decisions in your work and to be able to influence the principal. Stale information is usually not very persuasive. The principal is not likely to be much impressed with your knowledge if it is out of date.

Henry Mintzberg, the prominent organizational researcher, has perceptively pointed out that formal systems of communication in organizations provide people with past, not current, information.[32] If you wait for the department or faculty meeting to take place, or, worse, wait for the minutes of the meetings you didn't attend, you are condemned to being a step behind. Department, school, and district newsletters are even worse. Quarter, semester, and year-end reports going to or coming from the district have virtually no current value. If you are going to be able to offer assessments of current situations, you need to know what they are. That means you need to get out and talk to people.

Don't get caught up in jargon or titles. In talking with the principal, you need to stress what you can do for him or her and for the school. These are ideas best communicated in straight forward language, not in jargon. This is particularly true if your principal followed a very narrow career path to the principal's office and is not intimately familiar with the jargon of particular curricula, offices, programs, or services.

Build a strong relationship with the principal's secretary. One of the critical elements in working successfully with the principal is having an understanding of his or her idiosyncrasies, habits, and working style. Few people know these better than the secretary. The secretary who sees you as valuable may squeeze you in for a needed appointment that an indifferent secretary would never consider making. The secretary can look over written material you want to submit and offer ideas and corrections. Even if her input is small, you have complemented her by asking. You gain an advantage when the secretary delivers your message to the principal if she presents it with a smile and a positive word. On the other hand, you

lose a lot if she presents it with a derisive laugh or a comment that indicates you are a bother or your paper is a waste of time.[33]

There is a need to be very careful in building relationships with secretaries and other classified employees in a school. They very often see themselves as treated less than professionally by the certificated staff, and they are very sensitive to being used. It is very important that your relationship with the secretary be as honest as you can make it.

Learn the preferred chain of command. Find out the protocol for communicating with people at other schools in the district and at the central office. Some principals require that all upward communications be routed through their offices. There may be different channels for dealing with policy matters and for dealing with curriculum matters. Find out. You do not want to rupture relations by being perceived as having gone over the principal's head or of having made an "end run".

TACTICS

Ask for assignment to accreditation teams. You will be visible. You may bring back useful new ideas from the other schools you evaluate. You will broaden your contacts with educators from other schools. You will better understand what will happen when your school undergoes accreditation and can assist better with development of your school's self-study, which will again increase your contacts, associate you with the main thrust of the school mission, and enhance your visibility.

Volunteer for committees. No matter how good you are, your reputation depends on other people. Committees provide opportunities for you to make contributions that others will remark upon. If the principal chairs the committee, first-hand observation of your talents will be possible.

Another reason: principals care about how departments relate. High level attention is given to coordinating activities among varying departments, grade levels, and programs. You or your office can serve as a link-pin between them. This addresses the principle of centrality and being in a critical position.

- **Offer to write a column in the principal's newsletter to parents.**

This lightens the principal's burden, gives you access to the principal's attention, and access to parents. This tactic will increase visibility, open channels of communication, and give you a chance to display resources and demonstrate expertise. It also will tie your image more closely to the central mission of teaching and learning.

- **If you don't already have it, see if you can get a permanent position on the new student orientation program and on the program for the parents of new students.** This will increase your visibility and more closely associate you with the school's mission. The principal will be there and hear your presentation.

- **If you don't already have the responsibility, develop an orientation program for student teachers and for new hires.** If there is already an orientation program in place, find a way to get a part of it. The principal will be there and hear your presentation, plus you will open communication channels with teaching staff and increase the odds of developing mentor relationships.

- **Write grant proposals and seek other methods of securing outside funding and donations for the school.** These may range from large scale grants to donations from the Rotary or Soroptimists to a program for donating books or materials to the library in memory of a student, graduate, staff member or former staff member who has died (easily done with a prepared book plate). Principals deal in opportunities and wrestle for the dollars to create them. A person who creates opportunities and funding for programs is noticed and valued, particularly if these efforts also produce recognition for the school.

The tactic also increases your resource base, which is fundamental to the growth of influence.

- **See if you can be a lunchtime speaker for the Rotary, Lions, Optimists, Soroptimists, Kiwanis, community coordinating council, chamber of commerce, or other local civic group(s), especially if the principal or other administrator is a member of it.** The topic of your talk is probably not important, though it may be in your interest to develop an image separate from athletics.. Talking to

service groups can help the principal by highlighting the school in the community and can help fulfill any responsibility he/she may have for providing a program to the organization. It may also draw in resources which will increase your internal influence potential.

- **Develop a "brag" sheet or book for the principal and counselors to have in their offices.** Make it look professional; it is for adult consumption, not student. Many parents "shop" for schools when they move into an area, and with the movement toward choice and the growing emphasis on student capabilities and outcome-based education, many parents shop without moving. This can help an administrator or counselor make a solid presentation of the virtues of your school.

  This tactic increases your visibility and supports others in their efforts to improve their images.

- **If you get major and consistent support from your principal and other administrators, see if you can find a way for them to be honored for it by some organization.** The principal will know you made the nomination, but the award will not look self-serving if it comes from an outside agency.

- **If you are in a district where the principals attend school board meetings, attend such meetings yourself now and again.** The exposure is good; you'll be seen and recognized as involved; you'll be up to date on issues and you'll have fodder for conversation. The influence potential can be multiplied if you have an opportunity to speak in support of something the principal wants to have happen.

BUILDING INDIRECT INFLUENCE WITH THE PRINCIPAL BY BUILDING INFLUENCE WITH THOSE ABOVE THE PRINCIPALSHIP

- **Volunteer for district level committees**. The goal is to enhance visibility, familiarity, and the image of expertise.

- **Make regular presentations to the board of education**. The opportunity to develop visibility is all important. The reports themselves can give you a chance to deepen the image that the assistant principal's office is an integral part of the instructional program and tied to the central mission of the school. This can work especially well if the part of the report is delivered in cooperation with one or more teachers.

- **Be Prepared for Questions**. If you were suddenly asked at a board meeting or at some district wide committee meeting to justify your existence, what would you say?

- **Invite school board members and central office staff to any special programs you may have; acknowledge their presence if they come**. Central office personnel and board members receive many more negative communications from the public than they get positive. This tactic can help to restore the balance and associate you with good news and experiences, while increasing visibility, familiarity, and likability.

CONCLUSION

Building influence with the principal is a laborious, time consuming, and ceaseless undertaking, but it is absolutely essential if you are to be as effective and influential as you can be. Some people resent having to do so many things outside their job descriptions, actually in addition to their job descriptions, to manage their relationship with the principal. These people fail to realize that these activities are investments. As John Kotter and John Gabarro of the Harvard Business School point out, these activities can simplify jobs by eliminating potentially severe problems and miscommunications. If you view yourself in the final analysis as responsible for what you achieve, then you know that you need to establish good working relationships with everyone on whom you depend, including the principal.[34]

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